

Daycare proposal [CA]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

MIKE DUFFY: But first, let's get to child care and let's listen to what the party leaders were saying about the Conservative plan unveiled today.

STEPHEN HARPER (Conservative Leader): A new Conservative government will give all families a new \$1,200 a year payment called the choice in child care allowance for each child under the age of six. Second, a new Conservative government will set aside \$250 million each year to fund a community child care investment program.

PAUL MARTIN (Canadian Prime Minister): We're investing \$5 billion so that future generations of Canadians in those ridings and right across this land will get the best possible start in life. Now, Stephen Harper repeated today that he doesn't believe that public money should be put into day-care centres. Well, I do.

JACK LAYTON (NDP Leader): This is not a child care plan. It won't create any child care spaces. It's a tax plan and the leader should know the difference.

DUFFY: Joining us now to discuss what the child care needs of Canadian parents are, and what the parties are offering them, we're joined in Toronto by Ken Dryden, the Minister Responsible for Social Development. By Peggy Nash who's the NDP candidate in Parkdale-High Park in Toronto. And in Saskatoon by Conservative MP Carol Skelton. Now Miss Skelton, already you hear the Prime Minister saying, and Jack Layton echoing it, that the Conservatives aren't offering money for child care per se. But that seems to ignore one-half of your announcement today.

CAROL SKELTON (Conservative MP): Well, I disagree with that, Mike. We've promised \$250 million for 25,000 new child care spaces a year, and we're giving families and parents the choice on how to raise their children, and I think that is a great idea, and it's a great plan, and it's what Canadians told us that they wanted when we went right across Canada to ask them that.

DUFFY: Mr. Dryden, what's wrong with giving Canadians a choice of how they raise their kids?

KEN DRYDEN (Social Development Minister): Well if it was a real choice, Mike, but the \$1,200 a year after tax and taking the most favourable number represents about a thousand dollars per year. The average cost of child care in this country is \$8,000. So the impact is very small in that way. In terms of whether it would encourage parents to seek out better child care, again, representing only a thousand dollars' difference, the impact would be small. And even in terms of the Conservatives own points of where, of encouraging parents to stay home, when the average salary for a woman in this country is about \$25,000 and the average salary for a man is \$39,000, \$1,000 doesn't make very much of a difference.

DUFFY: I don't know, Mr. Dryden, have you actually read their proposal, because the footnote in the backgrounder that I read said that it wouldn't be taxable, this income. Maybe I misread it.

DRYDEN: Well the backgrounder that I received, the press release said \$1,200 and that it would be a taxable amount, but taxable in the hands of the lower income earner within the family.

DUFFY: I see. We didn't get new on it here. Let's get you in and the NDP. You don't think that parents should be given this money?

PEGGY NASH (NDP Candidate, Parkdale-High Park): Well, I don't think this is going to meet the needs of parents. You know, in the last federal election the Liberals promised a Quebec-style child care program, and in this minority government Jack Layton and the NDP made sure that the money went to child care. But we don't have a Quebec-style child care, and I think that if we did then parents would have the spaces that they need to look after their kids. The problem that we have today is that there's no real secure plan for creating spaces and not for profit centres across the country so that parents can get child care at an affordable rate so that they can look after their kids. When parents say that just give me the money and let me do what I want, that's because they don't have the spaces available. In Quebec, where there are spaces available, it was \$5, now \$7 a day, if you offer that to parents right across the country they'll grab that in a minute.

DUFFY: Ms. Skelton, what's your response to what you just heard?

SKELTON: Well, I think that one size fits all child care plan just doesn't work in Canada. We're such a vast country with so many different things that we have to think about, and it's best to give the parents the money so they can make the arrangements that they want for their children. And if they want their provincial government to work with their provincial government, make more child care spaces, that's great. And they will work with their community to put those child care spaces in place.

NASH: Well, that's like saying give me my thousand dollars and I'll buy my piece of road so that I can drive on it. I'll have the freedom and the choice to buy that piece of road, but I'm not going to go very far. When we pool our resources together, that's when we get the system that works for everybody. What we want the federal government to do is put the money into the not for profit system.

DUFFY: Both the minister and the NDP have said that they often believe that in fact public employees, i.e. teachers or child care workers, can do a better job raising our kids in their early years than Canadians' own parents.

DRYDEN: Mike, that's not true.

PEGGY NASH: That's not true.

DRYDEN: Mike, that's not true at all. That has never been said and that is not believed. What is the case is the great majority of parents are both in the workplace even when they have children. The question is, is what kind of care are they in? Is it good or is it not good? What child care offers is another instrument for parents in order to help raise their children. The fundamental question on the Conservative plan again is \$1,000 when in fact the average cost of child care in this country is \$8,000.

DUFFY: You're just saying it's not enough money.

DRYDEN: What I'm saying is it will have no effect on child care. It is something that does not have to do with child care. It is a tax benefit for families. That's what it is. It has nothing to do with child care.

NASH: With respect to, though, with the Liberal program, what we know is good quality child care rests in the not for profit sector, and it's not institutional child care, it's parent involved child care, and that's what exists in the province of Quebec. And what the existing Liberal program does is it allows for big box private child care to come into Canada and that's not good for Canadian kids.

DUFFY: Ms. Nash, your program would be something like medicare, wouldn't it, open-ended and who knows what it would cost? Isn't that why the Liberals have...

NASH: It will provide a secure service for parents and their kids...

DUFFY: Yeah, it would be great. But isn't that why the Liberals haven't done it because they're afraid it would be too expensive?

NASH: No, because I don't think they're committed to it. It's what parents want and they're not delivering. But they have delivered in a minority government after more than a decade of promising it, they delivered in a minority government to a limited degree although they haven't put the money in the not for profit sector, but only because Jack Layton and the NDP have forced them to.

DRYDEN: Mike, to be fair, that isn't true. The promise was made in the last election campaign by Paul Martin. We decided to deliver on it. It had nothing to do with a minority government, nothing to do with a minority government.

NASH: It's been promised since 1993 and it was only delivered by a minority government.

DRYDEN: Nothing to do with a minority government.

DUFFY: Final word to Carol Skelton in Saskatoon.

SKELTON: What we see is a Liberal government that went across this country and signed different agreements with every province and territory and we've got a mismatch right across this country of a very poor program that wasn't thought out, and didn't give parents the choices that they want and have clamoured to have. And I think that our program will give parents those choices.

NASH: It won't offer a child care system to parents.

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